

16 Get that job! A project on the German job application process

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1. Introduction

With decreasing numbers of students studying German at Higher Education Institutions in the United Kingdom, there is an increasing demand for graduate Germanists. This project, designed for C1/C2 level students according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, prepares finalist students for a job market in which UK and German businesses need culturally aware and competent speakers of English and German.

Through a holistic approach including reading, writing, listening and speaking, the exercises described below will increase students' professional employability skills.

Keywords: employability skills, job interview, German CV and cover letter, LinkedIn, social media profile.

2. What I did

In the first instance, students are invited to reflect upon the specific skills that make each individual unique. We discuss the nature of 'hard skills', such as their A-levels, a university degree and language skills. As a next step we discuss 'soft skills', which comprise communication skills, the ability to work in a team or leadership experience. Students reflect upon their own 'hard skills' and 'soft skills' and give examples of how they have acquired and used them previously.

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This could be, for example, their communication skills as student ambassadors, team leading skills by involvement in a local youth organisation or as a sports coach, or resilience when they coped well with stress successfully in a previous job. Students think about ‘hard’ and ‘soft skills’ and how they will use them in the job they are applying for, and also what they understand by transferable skills such as translation, presentation and IT. Thinking about skills enriches both undergraduates’ vocabulary and their self-awareness.

As a warm-up, learners analyse a German sample *curriculum vitae* and cover letter in a reading comprehension, noting phrases and technical terms they can use, but also the format and the layout. For more advanced reading texts, learners have to research online newspapers in the target language and read tips on the application process and take these tips into account.

As a writing exercise, students are then required to write their own CV and cover letter in the target language in response to a job advertisement that they find on the website praktikum.de using the European [europass website](https://europass.europa.eu). This web-based platform offers layouts for CVs in all European languages. CVs from this platform are very well regarded in German speaking countries. Users create a *europass* user profile and log on every time they make changes. This allows users to update their CV easily, accurately and professionally and create it in several languages if needed. Furthermore, *europass* offers helpful documents relating to CV drafting that can also help in creating a professional and appealing profile on LinkedIn, the frequently used tool for networking between alumni and for various job offers within a network.

In class, students next learn about cultural differences and awareness by discussing how photos are used in German job applications. Everybody reads the article “Die Gunst des kantigen Kinns” by Andreas [Ross \(2003\)](#) in the *Spiegel online* magazine. The class first analyses sample photos and briefly gives reasons orally and subsequently in three to four written sentences as to why one picture might be suitable whereas another might not be. They consider the background of the images, what candidates are wearing, their facial expressions, as well as the quality of the picture, e.g. a high resolution versus a blurry picture.

Students can show their own profile photos and discuss how to make the best impression on a potential employer and whether that image would be suitable for their LinkedIn profile.

As a substantive academic written task, students write an essay of 300-350 words discussing whether photos should be used in applications, or which professions need photos in their applications, like fashion models. Whereas adding a picture to an application is not typical in the UK, online networking tools are increasingly screened by potential employers. Awareness of this can be used when preparing social media profiles for graduate job hunting. Undergraduates should be aware what images of them are available online and which could work in their favour – or not – during an application process.

A sample job interview from the online magazine [Tomorrow Focus](#) is shown and serves as the basis for a listening comprehension exercise. This gives examples of both unsuccessful and successful job interviews with an analysis by professional coaches.

In the next step, students get a list of sample questions used in job interviews which they prepare in their own time. In another lesson, they conduct mock job interviews with their language tutor taking the role of the interviewer to enhance their awareness of themselves and for speaking practice. Alternatively, as a more informal and fun speaking implementation, the language tutor distributes role cards including useful phrases typically used by interviewees and a panel of interviewers. This allows the tutor to assign the roles of moderator, interviewer, and project manager, with students using new phrases to moderate a debate.

3. Discussion of outcomes and conclusion

The elements in teaching units can be delivered over several weeks and built up until students feel well prepared and competent in tackling any job application. The outcomes of this project are linguistic, using several language skills, but they are also cultural as they foreground differences in the German and UK

application process. They are also employability related because they actually practise the job interview itself in a foreign language. Job interviews are always nerve wracking, but practising them gives students the edge to perform well in a real job interview. As a follow-up exercise, a mock assessment centre situation can be set up. This final exercise provides future graduates not only with excellent and useful skills for the job market, but also an interactive role play that demands high-quality and linguistically challenging preparation and activities.

References and links

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